

A letter on police brutality in Los Angeles

29 September 1999

To the editor:

Two years ago, my friend from Belgium and I were at Venice Beach, and I witnessed the murder of an old black homeless man at 5 p.m., September 5. LA Channel 7 news apparently briefly sent their helicopter over and was waved away. A friend said he saw "breaking news" on Channel 7, which spoke of a murder, then nothing else.

The police closed down the entire Venice boardwalk, and detained everyone for hours (a few thousand tourists). The police were rude and belligerent gathering (herding) all of us into one area. Tourists from the UK and Australia were really in shock. Asians were panicked. After three and a half hours, I went up to someone in authority, made excuses and did not tell the truth to get my friend and myself out of there. Tensions were rising and things were getting scary. Potential witnesses were being thrown on the ground, their only indiscretion being not understanding English.

The next day, I contacted a friend, former police psychologist, yes, for the Venice police. He made a couple of calls, and immediately called me back. He told me the officers in question had been given 30 days off with pay. He also told me he wanted to spend the rest of the day with me to help me psychologically. He was great, though I was still in shock. He did help me through that day. He helped me again two weeks later, when I called him and said, "I saw LAPD kill that old local black man that everybody knew!" He always carried this five-foot bamboo pole, used it like a cane, and when anyone came within twenty feet of him, he would raise it (with it being vertical to the ground) and say, "stand back." If you would stay twenty feet away from him, he would speak nicely to you. When the officer came up to him, he raised his "staff" and said, "stand back." I heard the officers shout, "drop your weapon!", I think twice, and then they shot to kill. This old dreadlocked hair guy did not perceive his "staff" (cane) as a weapon.

About a month after the incident, my friend called me to tell me that the officer had been reprimanded for using excessive force, but that nothing else was going to come of it.

Apparently, there are many stories like this.

Thanks,

FF



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